

REPAIRING UNITED STATES LEGATION PREMISES AND
GROUNDS, BANGKOK, SIAM.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF STATE,

TRANSMITTING

COPY OF A DISPATCH FROM THE MINISTER OF THE UNITED
STATES AT BANGKOK, SIAM, RELATIVE TO THE REPAIRING
OF THE UNITED STATES LEGATION PREMISES AND GROUNDS
AT BANGKOK.

MARCH 29, 1900.—Referred to the Committee on Appropriations and ordered to be
printed.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, March 26, 1900.

SIR: Referring to this Department's letter of January 5, 1900 (House Document No. 249, Fifty-sixth Congress, first session), recommending an appropriation of \$2,000, or so much thereof as may be necessary, for repairing and improvement of the legation premises belonging to the United States at Bangkok, Siam, I have the honor to inclose herewith copy of a further dispatch from the minister of the United States at Bangkok, stating reasons why an allowance for repairing the legation premises and grounds should be made.

In the diplomatic and consular appropriation bill for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1901, as passed by the Senate, an item of \$2,000 for repairing and improvement of the legation premises at Bangkok is included. The Department understands that the bill is now in conference committee.

I have the honor to be, sir, your obedient servant,

JOHN HAY.

HON. WILLIAM P. FRYE,

President pro tempore of the United States Senate.

LEGATION OF THE UNITED STATES,
Bangkok, February 2, 1900.

SIR: Permit me to call the attention of the Department to the present condition and needs of the United States Legation grounds and buildings at this post.

In diplomatic dispatch No. 46, of August 26, 1899, I set before the Department the possibilities of enlarging the present grounds, etc., with the argument in favor of the same, all of which was at the time, and is as yet, quite problematical, as I have carefully avoided further mention of the subject pending a reply from Washington. The reply has not yet come—six months. The fact that this whole question was open has caused me to delay presenting this matter before, but meanwhile things have come to such a condition that to save the property from very rapid decay and to put it in decent shape for the time it will be occupied, even in the event of the changes mentioned being accomplished, it is necessary to take the matter in hand at once.

The building is in very bad shape and beyond permanent repair. This, perhaps, can be better seen from the inclosed letters, which were written by men altogether competent to speak. And the remarks on the worth of the legation building were unsolicited. I simply asked for figures on the improvements necessary for the immediate future.

My own idea of the building is such that I have not thought it wise to let my wife and family know the contents of the letters touching the safety of the structure, and, although a poor man, I should never dream of occupying a building of such dilapidated appearance in America. Of a new building it is foolishness to speak, however, so long as the question of grounds is in the condition it is now.

Whatever may be the decision on the question of grounds and buildings, the immediate needs are these:

(1) To paint the building inside and out, to paint and whitewash the fences, and to make some slight repairs.

(2) To fill up the old boathouse dock and repair the wall and bunding about it.

(3) Rock ballast for the exposed northwest corner on water front.

(4) New outbuildings.

(5) Sheet piles, etc., to save bunding.

(1) The building has not been painted since my predecessor had it repaired in 1894 and 1895. Since that time wooden eave troughs and other repairs, constantly made necessary by the temporary nature of the bungalow, have been made, which serve to give it something of the Joseph's-coat appearance, made of very seedy material.

(2) The boathouse dock indicated on the diagram is a bad sink or hole, which marks the site of an old boathouse. It is open to the wash of the tides, which have been making bad inroads on the grounds, materially diminishes the size of our too contracted grounds, and makes a very unsightly hole in the front of the premises.

(Part of 1) In addition to the painting inside and out we must have the eave troughs renewed and some other work done immediately.

(3) By consulting the diagram it will be seen that the northwest corner of the bunding is especially exposed to the currents, which are very rapid here during a good part of the year. This expense is due to the dilapidated condition of the landing at the entrance to the lane, across the front of which entrance is no bunding whatever. Here the water has worn away the shore far under the landing and is constantly undermining the bunding of the legation property. A few tons of ballast placed there now will save large expense in the near future. This need is imperative, whatever we do with the sheet piling along the front.

(4) The entire water front of the grounds, to the depth inland of some 30 or 40 feet—one-half the frontage—gave way in Mr. Barrett's time and slid into the river. This was filled in with the ashes of rice husks (paddy ash), covered with 3 or 4 inches of soil, and held in place by the piles that form the present bunding. This bunding is backed in the cheapest manner possible by bamboo mats. It seems hardly possible that such could have stood for the five or six years it has been in position, and indeed it has required constant attention and repairs. The matting is giving way and the light ash is washing out. The very substantial piling is yet in good condition, however, and if immediately backed by sheet piling or slabs set on end and driven well down below the slime and mud, into which the more substantial soil beneath the paddy ash is rapidly being converted, will save the bunding and the frontage.

There is one break in the piling already, three great piles being pushed out of line by the great pressure of the sliding mass behind them, and since Mr. Fariola's examination there has appeared a very decided rift in the soil 30 feet back from the piling. This was predicted by Mr. Fariola, but we scarce expected to see it so soon. What was then a need in theory is now a pressing one in reality and must be attended to at once. How much this sheet piling will cost one can not tell until the surface is removed and the condition of the underlying soil be examined. Of one thing we can be assured. That is, it will be much less to-day than it will be if left till the soil of the lawn has slipped into the water, carrying with it the large piling, which is now in good condition.

I am of the opinion that this will not be an expensive piece of work, and may be less than the figure both Mr. Bennett and Mr. Fariola put it at. Besides the loss of soil and piling which must be replaced, we should have four beautiful big banyan trees, which serve the present purposes of shade and beauty above ground and the protection of their roots in binding the soil beneath. This is the most expensive matter in the improvements required, but such a valuable piece of property as I have shown this to be in a previous dispatch should not be allowed to go to decay. This is an immediate and imperative need.

(5) The outbuildings, with the exception of the cook house, which is a permanent structure of mason work with tile roof, are so bad that we must renew them. Originally of bamboo walls and thatched roof, they are now in a very bad condition and can not be repaired, hence I recommend that new ones of cheap wood be built on the present site. These buildings or structures are for the servants' quarters, the stable, and the washhouse. They are put up in the most temporary manner, of most fragile material—bamboo and thatching—and, besides being a constant menace from fire, are now in a most dilapidated, tumble-down condition.

The entire compound, with its structures, is in a condition that demands the attention of the Government at once.

I recommend that the Department place to my credit a fund of \$2,500 against which I can draw for the necessary repairs. In its use I shall exercise the same care that I should in using my own funds and make an itemized report of all expenses. This figure is fixed upon after careful consideration and consultation with men of practical experience. My schooling as a contractor and builder in youth enables me to secure to the Government an economy of expenditures in the

matter, and in no way shall I make expense on repairs that will be but by a possible change of plans for the compound in the near future.

Our national holiday is not far off, and what is done should be done before that date. Hence if the Department will cable at my expense the words "King, Bangkok—yes" I shall proceed with the work, keeping within the limits here placed, until I receive further instructions by mail.

If the question be asked why the premises have been permitted to run down in this manner without previous notice to the Department, in behalf of my predecessor it is just to say that current report says he left the compound in far better condition than he found it. His repairs were of a most temporary character, for two reasons; (a) the limited appropriation at his command, and (b) the feeling that the building must shortly be replaced by a new one. During my stay here the possible changes of plan that might become necessary if the grounds were enlarged, and the possibility of the enlargement on which these changes depended, have kept me from making a request for an appropriation until necessity, even for the present conditions, has compelled me.

The keeping up of an establishment such as this on a contingent fund that is fitted for the office expenses only, and no rent fund, is an impossibility. I have been compelled to put between \$100 and \$200 of my personal funds into repairs that were unavoidable, if one would live in the building.

Trusting that I may receive an early and favorable reply,

I remain, dear sir, your most obedient servant,

HAMILTON KING.

Hon. JOHN HAY,

Secretary of State, Washington, D. C.

[Inclosure.]

BANGKOK, January 29, 1900.

DEAR SIR: With reference to your inquiry regarding cost of necessary repairs to the legation grounds, house and outhouses, and foreshore, I beg to report to you as follows:

Legation residence and offices.—I beg to inform you that it is my opinion that this house is far beyond repairing, being an old wooden and bamboo house which has stood on its present site for thirty-five years, and I consider it not only not fit to live in, but actually dangerous, especially during the spring when with the change of the monsoon Bangkok is frequently visited with rather heavy windstorms, and during one of these I consider that the old house is liable to collapse bodily, for two or three very good reasons.

First. The age of the house and class of wooden material of which it is constructed, together with my knowledge that the insects, such as white ants, have during these many years eaten the timber and posts so that they are no longer safe. This is especially true of the foundation timbers and posts under the ground floor.

Second. The foundations consist simply of round wooden posts let into the ground, some of which have a little masonry built around them, while many of them have nothing at all, and the posts and lower timbers of the foundation are completely rotten and in consequence there is a difference of nearly 6 inches in the levels of the house, due entirely to its having subsided at different places owing to the rotten condition of the timber foundations.

Third. During the residence of the late minister, Mr. Barrett, he removed the old palm-leaf thatched roof, which was exceedingly light, and replaced same with an iron and heavy shingle roof, the shingles being made of hard teak wood, considerably increasing the weight of the roof, far beyond what it is safe to carry, especially considering the very shaky condition of the foundations, so that the house is topheavy and might possibly collapse from the effect of an ordinary windstorm.

It is not worth repairing, except such ordinary repairs and cleaning as are absolutely necessary to make it tenable until another house can be provided.

Servants' quarters and stables.—These are of bamboo with thatched roof, highly inflammable, and disgraceful-looking structures to have inside the legation grounds, and are such sheds as the common coolies live in, and of a class not now allowed to be built within the city limits (by special proclamation issued by the King). They should certainly be pulled down and rebuilt from material less inflammable.

Bunding and foreshore.—This is in a bad condition, and I fear that the land will subside again during the extremely low water of the next few months.

What is required is to place behind the present piles, which are driven into the ground, good sheet piling placed as closely together as possible to protect the ground from the wash of the river and prevent the water from scouring out the earth behind the bunding. And, more important still, the whole slope of the foreshore in front of the bunding should be protected by another 1,000 tons, at least, of broken rock, to be distributed along the front of the bunding, and thus give weight to hold up the ground behind and prevent the water scouring away the earth.

Estimated cost of necessary repairs as above.

	Ticals.
Repairing bunding, excavating, and placing sheet piles, etc.....	5,000
Placing at least 1,000 tons of broken rock in front of bunding.....	1,500
Outhouses:	
Replacing thatched roof, bamboo, servants' shed, with wooden houses and corrugated-iron roof.....	1800
Residence:	
Painting residence, fence, etc.....	750
Other necessary repairs to residence and premises	300
Total.....	8,350

I have the honor to remain, yours, truly,

L. E. BENNETT, C. E.

HON. HAMILTON KING,
American Legation.

BANGKOK, January 12, 1900.

DEAR MR. KING: I inclose an estimate for the few repairs which I would recommend to be made to the old barn which is dignified with the name of the United States legation, and which is utterly unfit for the residence of a European family of very moderate means, leave alone the family of a minister resident of a first-class power.

No doubt that when newly built the house was good enough for a single man to live in, much of whose time would probably be spent out of doors, and it was perhaps also in keeping with the condition of the town generally. To-day it has become dilapidated—an unavoidable fate for all timber structures in this climate—and any money spent upon it would be sheer waste, and I could advise only such repairs as may render the place a little less uncomfortable and less shabby-looking pending the decision of the authorities at home upon the only proposal that could be submitted to them—the pulling down of the present building and the erection of a new one of brick and mortar. As two or three years will surely elapse before such a house could be ready for occupation, your submitting such a proposal could never make you open to a suspicion of being moved by your own private comfort, and the cost of the repairs I advise—about \$720, Mexican—is not much, in view of the time the old building must still serve for both offices and residence of a minister and his family.

As for the bunding, I can not say that it is an urgent matter, like the repainting of the house; but further damages may occur without warning whenever the river will be in flood again and a strong current occurs at or near the surface. In such a case the water rendering more fluid the semiliquid mud, which is found everywhere at a few feet below the surface of the ground, this mud will be set moving toward the river, passing under the boards which form the face of the bunding, and the ground must necessarily subside, while the increased pressure due to the motion of the ground will further disturb the bunding.

The cause of all this trouble is that while Barrett caused the round piles of the bunding to be well driven into the solid subsoil, he did not drive the wall itself through the mud down to that subsoil; at least this is my impression from what I saw when I arrived here in July, 1894. The remedy I would propose—a brick and mortar

¹ Actual bid on this item is 1,600 ticals.—H. K.

wall being out of the question, and would cost more than a new house—is that the bunding should be completed by sheet piling. It would be necessary to excavate the made ground to about the bottom of the board wall and then drive vertically and close together roughly dressed slabs—a material always obtainable at the sawmills, and inexpensive—these slabs to be well driven into the subsoil.

As to the cost of the operation it would be hard to estimate it with accuracy, my experience of the foreshores and banks of the river being that most unexpected variations occur within very short distances, and it is quite possible that the deep mud occurs only at one spot, while it might be found necessary to protect with sheet piling the whole 50 meters of your river front. To arrive at some estimate a certain number of borings should be made, say every 8 or 10 meters, and in the absence of boring tackle this boring will already cost a little money.

It is quite unnecessary to take sections of the foreshore, as from the outline of the river you could not expect to be allowed to extend the reclamation of the foreshore beyond the alignment of the bunding, and it is the depth of the semiliquid mud which the engineer must know in order to estimate the quantity of material required. Once the sheet piling in position, the trench should be filled up with broken brick, the mud being in part scooped out and the bricks well rammed down.

Your grounds would be the better for being raised 8 to 10 inches.

I think that you should ask for a credit for this work of say 5,000 ticals, which I think will suffice to make a good job, but without undertaking that it will be sufficient. The best time to go on with the work would be from March to June or July.

You may use this informal report in corresponding with the State Department, but I can not make it official, as by the terms of my appointment of city engineer I am debarred from engaging in private practice. For the same reason you must accept my services as absolutely gratuitous. I shall always be happy to place them at your disposal as well from personal regard to yourself as from respect and affection for the Government of our country.

Yours, very faithfully,

O. FARIOLA DE ROZZOLI,

Lieutenant-Colonel, City Engineer for the Local Government of Bangkok.

Hon. HAMILTON KING,

United States Minister Resident, Bangkok.

BANGKOK, January 12, 1900.

Hon. HAMILTON KING,
U. S. Minister Resident.

Specifications and estimates for repairs recommended as urgent for the United States legation:

	Sq. meters.	Ticals.
1. To give one coat of best oil paint, outside and inside, to all the walls, timber pillars, staircases, frames, etc., of dwelling house, viz:		
2 ceilings, 25 by 14.50 meters = 89 meters	725	
4 walls, 2 faces, 25 by 7 meters	1,400	
5 walls, 2 faces, 14.50 by 7 meters	1,015	
Total	3,140, at 0.30 ticals =	942
2. To fix galvanized-iron guttering to the roof round the house:		
0. 25 meters guttering, 80 meters, at 2 ticals	160	
8 pieces down water pipes, 0.10 by 7 meters = 56 meters, at 1.50 ticals	84	
3. Opening 2 small windows and fittings, at 15 ticals		244
4. Filling up the boathouse dock, closing the entrance with timber bunding		30
5. Repairing the dividing wall of legation and adjoining premises on south side, and repairing the water-closet and gangway		350
Total		1,716

The above estimate is for materials and labor at present rates. The increasing tendency of both material and labor prices, which still continues, make it probable that 10 per cent may have to be added if the work be delayed six months from now.

O. FARIOLA DE ROZZOLI, *City Engineer.*

Mr. Fariola omitted the estimate on the outbuildings, although he fully recognized the need of this improvement. In his notes he overlooked the item.—H. K.